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**Governor Schweitzer & Governor Shiotani Celebrate the 25th
Anniversary of Montana's Sister State Relationship with
Kumamoto Japan**

(HELENA) – Governor Brian Schweitzer and Kumamoto Governor Yoshiko Shiotani celebrated the 25th anniversary of Montana's sister state relationship with Kumamoto, Japan on Monday, August 6, at the State Capitol.

In the morning, Governor Schweitzer and Governor Shiotani planted three lilac trees in honor of the 25 year sister state relationship, on the front Capitol lawn. In the afternoon, Governor Schweitzer, Governor Shiotani, Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger, members of the Kumamoto Legislative Assembly, Montana's Legislative delegation, Montana state officials and invited guests attended an official anniversary ceremony in the Capitol rotunda.

"I am proud to join Governor Shiotani in honoring the long standing diplomatic partnership between Montana and Kumamoto," Governor Schweitzer said. "This anniversary speaks to the value of cross cultural relationships. Our collaboration is an example of how a solid partnership can connect two societies, literally worlds apart."

Governor Schweitzer and Governor Shiotani exchanged gifts commemorating the event. Governor Schweitzer presented Governor Shiotani with a satin Cheyenne Star Quilt, created by Claude Denver Leedom of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. Governor Shiotani presented Governor Schweitzer with a piece of dyed fabric art, created by Kumamoto artist Akemi Takatsu.

In 1979, Mike Mansfield, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, began discussions with Governor Sawada of Kumamoto Prefecture about the possibility of establishing a sister state/prefecture affiliation between Kumamoto and Montana.

On July 22, 1982, sister affiliations between Montana and Kumamoto governments, universities, and television stations, were formalized in a signing ceremony in the Montana State Capitol. The sister affiliations established a forum for the creative exchange of information, ideas, and people in the fields of education, government, culture, and social relations. In 1983 the Montana Senate and House of Representatives passed a joint resolution endorsing Montana's sister relationship with the Prefecture of Kumamoto.

Currently, annual exchange programs exist at the university and high school levels for teachers and students. Both governments have been active with exchange visits by state and local elected officials and staff. Since 1984 the Kumamoto government has assigned a staff person to work in Montana and in June 1992 established Kumamoto Plaza, a cultural center in downtown Helena. In October 1990 Montana opened a state trade office in the Kumamoto Prefectural Office Building.

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